

Encourage

After Easter last year I was in hospital for a week while they decided what the problem was with my heart. I found out that, as a child, I had undiagnosed Rheumatic Fever which had resulted in severely damaged heart valves. It was apparent that with my aortic valve only operating at 27 % my days were drastically numbered. I was offered aortic valve replacement.

I was told that one of the outcomes of having this surgery would be that I may not survive the operation because of the extent of the damage. I was very aware that I would either wake up in the intensive care unit or in glory. Having a day and time of what could be my last on this earth put a whole different perspective on my life.

I was ready to meet my maker, the God of creation, but had I done everything he had expected me to do? I asked myself what could I have done differently to live closer to the way Jesus showed us to live? Had I always listened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Did the way I live have a huge impact on those around me?

The answer to these questions was I had failed. If I asked you the same question would your answer be any different? In all of this I do need to say thank you Jesus for taking the parts of my life that I am not proud of and covering them with your blood so I will stand as white as snow before my God.

The church in Thessalonica had only been established for 2 or 3 years when Paul wrote a letter giving reminders of how to live and encourage others. The gospel is not only what we believe but also how we live with the Holy Spirit to lead us. Live as though you expect to meet Christ's at any time, don't be caught unprepared.

I woke up in the intensive care unit with more time on earth. God must have more work for me to do. The question remains ; how am I supposed to live; how can I impact others?

Let me read 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 11 to 18 from the NIV which offers guidelines on how to live.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

I see this passage divided into three sections, the first is our attitude to our leaders, the second is our attitude to others and finally guidelines for self. Firstly we will look at our attitude to leaders, then we will side track with a huge tangent but then will come back to look at the last two sections. I just like to tell you in case you get lost as to where this is going.

Firstly what 1 Thessalonians 5 says about our attitude to our church leaders

V11 *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing* . This is a clear instruction. Although we are to encourage everybody we need to take time to encourage our leaders. Tell of a quality you appreciate in him, encourage him and

build him up. My Life Application Bible has verse 12 much more clearly as it says Honour the officers of your church.

We can either honour or dishonour, it's one or the other. Without honour our whole system of law and order breaks down. When we have no honour we have no power. Unfortunately honour has lost it's meaning, it's out dated, relegated to the past with the other dinosaurs like loyalty, honesty, integrity, faithfulness. Honour holds the key to and is associated with the release of the power and anointing of God. If you look in the Scriptures you can find this mentioned 200 times. Let me say this a second time, if it's important enough for God to say it 200 times it is important for me to tell you twice. Honour holds the key to and is associated with the release of the power and anointing of God.

Just briefly, honour also has aspects of looking for ways to cooperate. We all need to be ready to help as we are called. Another aspect of honour is to withhold your next critical comment, so easy to say, so hard to practice. Vicky reminded us on Mother's Day "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all.

Verse 13 in the NIV tells us to *Hold them in the highest regard in love* or in the Living Application Bible *give them your wholehearted love*

We are going to put this into practice right now. You have the opportunity to encourage Roly, to build him up, honour him or say thank you. There are 10 cards around the room for you to write something on. Please take a moment to write something to encourage, honour or thank him while I move on to the tangent.

God had given us these guidelines in Thessalonians to live life to the full for him. The question remains ; how am I supposed to live; how can I impact others.

Currently not many of our population, let alone those calling themselves followers of Jesus are living by these principles. Our world is an ungodly place, nobody is safe, crime is rampant, the police exhausted, the courts are filled, employment relations are low. Every day the newspaper and TV are filled with stories which must make God cringe.

Let me tell you of a time in Wales in 1907 nearly 110 years ago when their news headlines read:-

Another Pub goes Bankrupt People of all ages are staying away from pubs and night clubs.

The publican said that all staff had been stood down last week as he was able to manage on his own. Now it is no longer economically viable to stay open when people are staying away in their droves. He blames the churches for a lack of patrons.

Police unemployed; no work for policemen Police numbers are being drastically cut as there is little work for them to do.

Police have been asked to take all holiday leave in full, older men have been offered early retirement, newly qualified police officer cannot find employment.

Judges given white gloves Crime has diminished so much that Judges have been presented with white gloves signifying that there are no cases for them to consider. Most of the courts are in recess at this time.

Living next to a church used to be quiet but what is going on in the churches now Church meetings are starting at the normal time of 10am but are not finishing until midnight when the congregational are told to go home and go to bed. People are reluctant to leave as they are still singing, giving testimonies, praying and reading their Bibles out loud. Neighbours are joining the church as it sounds so alive and inviting.

Disruption at the Mine Work came to a standstill down the mine when the horses refused to work.

So many miners stopped using foul language that the horses which hauled the coal trucks could no longer understand what was being said to them and transportation ground to a halt.

Miners and managers meet at the pit head. This peaceful meeting an hour before work was to meet together to sing and pray. They all say it is a great way to start their workday.

The coal miners, while thousands of feet below the earth, are gathering during their meal breaks, not to eat but to pray and read the Bible aloud.

This is so different from today's news. The reason for these unusual stories being reported is that revival had come to Wales. It is possible for God's people to live differently as proved at this time.

These people lived differently and thousands of others were impacted. Much like the day of Pentecost. The Welsh nation read and applied *2 Chronicles 7:14* *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Many of today's church have a harsh unloving attitude towards one another. If there is one place on earth that we should find love you would expect it to be in the church. We may be better than most but this year many people have tried us and not returned. How can we do, what we do, better.

We need to look at the second section of the text - **Our attitude to others.**

Jackie Pullinger spent thirty years working in the lawless walled city of Kowloon. She is reported to say God wants us to have soft hearts and hard feet, the trouble with many of us is that we have hard hearts and soft feet. Christians should have hard feet to go anywhere and a soft heart filled with compassion. This will help us put into practice how we interact with others.

Eddie Gibb a church growth expert once said "The level of unemployment in the nation pales into insignificance in comparison with that which prevails in the church". A few people are exhausted, while the rest are under-utilised.

The church has been likened to a football match in which thousands of people in desperate need of exercise watch 30 people in desperate need of a rest. If everyone increased their hours as a volunteer for the church we could certainly impact this city for God.

We read how all these new volunteers with soft compassion filled hearts are to live each day so as to impact others.

Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

Live in peace with each other. The easiest way to live in peace would be if everybody was exactly the same as I am. We would always be in agreement as there would be no need to disagree.

My son has neighbours who have spoken to them twice in 12 years. The second time was a couple of weeks ago when the poles securing their scaffolding were over the fence into the neighbours property. He apologised for the inconvenience and offered to have the scaffolding removed the next day. An expensive way to live in peace. In the end it wasn't necessary.

We need to search for ways to get along – no quarrelling. It doesn't say we are to live in peace with those we like but live in peace with each other.

We urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, Some versions say warn the lazy others say warn the idle. Lazy and idle are slightly different, but we do know they are not working for the good of the community whatever name we use. We need to know who the lazy or idle folks are so that we can warn them. It seems to be, that this is everybody sitting in the crowd, watching the exhausted ones who need a rest. I like to think that the lazy are anyone doing less than I am. Most people respond to a challenge rather than straight out telling them they are lazy. Ask for their help in an area they could manage or challenge them to join in with something you are involved with.

Encourage the timid, help the weak and be patient with everyone. Many people have been hurt during their life. Hurts to self esteem, self worth and self value do not go away, they are just under the skin leaving people timid, weak and susceptible to new hurts. Our churches, neighbourhoods, hospitals are filled with so many people who are frightened as well as those physically , emotionally and

spiritually weak who need to be comforted and encouraged. Take great care of the marginalised in our society.

While undertaking a management course I learned of the Minute Management technique. I learned to take a moment to speak to everyone I work with to encourage or thank them for something I noticed them do or say. It only takes a moment but the rewards are amazing. All too often we hear others putting each other down. God says to take a moment to encourage the timid or to help the weak .

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. This was also written by Peter when he says And now this word to all of you: You should be like one big happy family, full of sympathy towards each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't snap back at those who say unkind things about you. Instead pray for God's help for them, for we are to be kind to others, and God will bless us for it.

Lastly we need to look at the last section of the text- **The guidelines for self**

We heard last week from Joel 2: 28 I will pour out my Spirit on all people. On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came for all, the promise of the Father has been fulfilled. We have the power to be witnesses. We can impact others.

We have a pilot light on our gas hot water, it stays on all the time but nothing happens until we turn on the flow of water. This reminds me of people who only have the pilot light of the Holy Spirit in their lives, it's there but nothing spectacular happens.

How do we change our life from ordinary to spectacular. In Romans Paul tells us to *be transformed*. Many are fearful of change in their life; two caterpillars saw a butterfly passing by. One turned to the

other and said “You won’t catch me going up in one of those.” Great is our fear of leaving behind what we are comfortable with.

Our reading says *Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Being joyful is different from being happy. At the Sydney Writers Festival earlier in the month Hugh Mackay repudiated the concept and pursuit of happiness. Don’t waste time pursuing happiness, impact others by being joyful.

Talk to God about what is going on around you, short prayers throughout the day are both worthwhile and sustaining. I promised God I would pray as I walked into work every day, to ask for the Holy Spirit to direct me. I was so much more effective while I remember to do this but then I forgot. I need to renew my promise and remember if I am going to have an impact.

Praying isn’t one way, we need to have two way communication with God. Imagine going to the doctor and saying, I have an itch on my back, been having these headaches, I have a fungal infection under my toe nail, my tennis elbow is still playing up and I need a flu jab. Oh goodness, time to go. We need to learn to listen to hear God’s voice. We recognise the voice of a good friend on the phone, in the same way, we will recognise his voice when we know Jesus better.

And finally the last of our guidelines reminds us to give thanks in all circumstances because *this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.* I am really glad that we need to give thanks in all circumstances not for all of the circumstances. It’s a bit like if you get the flu don’t give thanks for the flu, but do give thanks for the rest time, time off work and the good things people bring for you.